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Well-Drilling Nearly Done; Water Samples Come Next

By RAYMOND RANEY

The U.S. Geological Survey is about a week shy of completing the initial well drilling for its study of the ground water in southwestern Elkhart County, The Truth learned Monday.

The USGS drilling team has been working since September and has drilled between 75 and 100 wells, according to Bill Meyer, USGS field representative. Fewer than 10 wells remain to be drilled.

Meyer said he expects the drilling team to return to the county next summer to drill deeper wells in some areas. However, when the remaining wells are drilled next week, much of the study will be completed.

"We're getting ready to start taking water samples from the wells during the next month," he said.

The water samples then will be shipped to the USGS laboratory for analysis, Meyer said. Tests will be run to determine if anything is polluting the wells.

He could give no estimate on when the tests would be completed or when the information obtained would be released. The information will be analyzed by the USGS and released when we know what it means," he said.

The objective now is to establish the underground strata and water flow, Meyer said.

With that information, pollutants could be traced to their origins and could be used in court for any legal action against polluters.

The USGS was asked to study the Elkhart ground water problem after the city realized its water supply might be in danger of pollution.

The city's well fields on North Main Street are centered between two pollution problems: the C.R. 10-Fort Wayne area on the west and the 3700 block area of East Jackson Boulevard on the east.

Both areas' wells have been polluted by industrial chemicals. The residents have charged that the source of the water side problems is the former Himco Land fill located

adjacent to the properties involved, and that the east side source is the industrial park on Middlebury Street.

Although the complete study will require about 2½ years, preliminary data should be available next year, Meyer said.

The survey covers about 100 square miles, from the St. Joseph County line to the Six Span Bridge and from north of Elkhart to the Dunlap area.

The cost is approximately \$260,000. Half of that is paid by USGS funds, and the remaining funds are split between the state Department of Natural Resources and the Elkhart Water Works.

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Hoping for help on Himco

Mayor heads to Washington in quest to get dump cleaned up soon

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By [Steve Bibler](#)
Truth Staff

ELKHART -- Mayor Dave Miller and Elkhart City Council President Jim Pettit are meeting with the Indiana Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C., today with an eye on expediting cleanup of the Himco dump Superfund Site in Cleveland Township.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is in negotiations with several local firms or settling parties over cleanup of the 60-acre site located northwest of C.R. 10 and the John Weaver Parkway.

The city's lobbyist, Joseph Loftus of Barnes & Thornburg, arranged for today's meetings with the staffs of Sens. Dick Lugar and Evan Bayh and Reps. Chris Chocola and Mark Souder, Miller said.

"We will ask for their assistance in bringing together an affordable resolution for something that has drug on for 15 years. It's time this be resolved. We believe we may be able to accomplish this," Miller said.

By his own count, this is Miller's sixth trip to Washington on city business during his two terms as mayor. Unlike previous trips, when he lobbied for federal dollars for major public works projects, Miller said this trip will be merely to ask the Hoosier delegation to make some phone calls on the city's behalf.

The ongoing negotiations "are rather sensitive," he said, and he preferred not to go into detail out of fear that "too much information may harm those efforts."

At the city's request, State Sen. Timothy Neese wrote the EPA last week asking that the EPA modify its demand that the settling parties bear the full cost of the cleanup.

In a May 11 letter to Bharat Mathur, acting Region 5 administrator, Neese wrote that "a group of companies (settling parties) responsible for a relatively small portion of site wastes have



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Site of the old Himco dump looking west from John Weaver Parkway. Mayor Miller is traveling to Washington D.C. to try to speed up the process of cleaning up the area.

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made an offer to U.S. EPA to settle agency claims by agreeing to perform the remedial action designated by the agency."

Neese said the EPA's "demand that those companies pay approximately \$6 million in its past costs in addition to the estimated \$10 million remediation costs threatens those settlement negotiations."

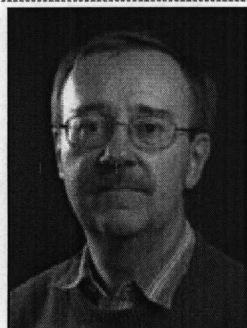
As part of a compromise, Neese suggests the EPA look to other parties for the recovery of its past costs and allowing the settling parties to perform the remediation.

As an alternative, Neese said, "We would be grateful if you could encourage the agency personnel responsible for the site to exercise their discretion by waiving most or all of its past cost claims against the settling parties. The agency can always pursue the site owner and operator, Himco Waste Away, and the many non-settling waste generator parties for its past costs."

Neese contends that the EPA's "insistence on the full payment of its past costs will exceed the settling parties' resources and will likely result in lengthy litigation that will benefit no one. We request that the agency accept the settling parties' offer to repay only a portion of the agency's past costs so that the remedial work can begin soon."

Neese sent copies of his letter to Lugar, Bayh, Chocoma and Souder, the Department of Justice and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

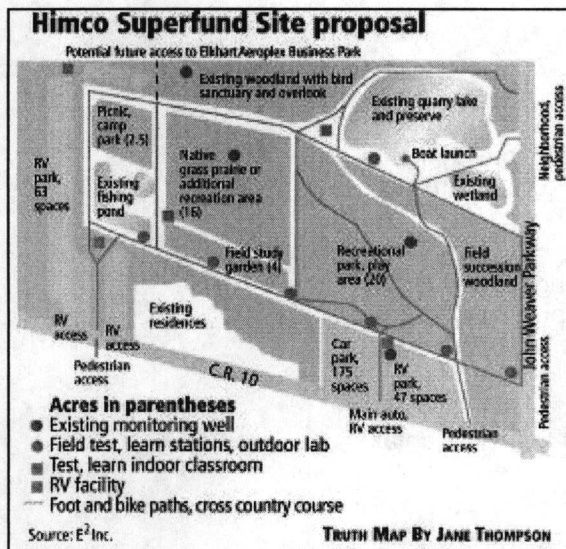
Elkhart Park Superintendent Bob Edel, Elkhart City Councilman Brian Thomas and Elkhart County Commissioner Phil Stiver also sent letters to the EPA. The EPA is drafting a response to those letters, an agency spokeswoman said.




*Steve Bibler is a staff business writer for The Truth.
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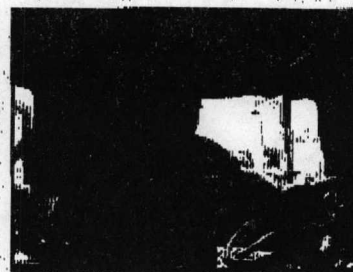
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